A LITTLE CATECHISM ON THE RELIGIOUS STATE

THE SOCIETY OF ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST

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NOTE.—*The Principles of the Religious Life are the same for both sexes. For the sake of convenience the masculine pronoun has been used throughout.*

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FOREWORD.

THE CATHOLIC REVIVAL of the last century of necessity involved the revival of the Religious State, both for men and women. Whenever the Church's life has been strong and vigorous, there have been many Aspirants to the Religious Life. The condition of the Religious Orders is a faithful index of the Church's vitality, and may be termed her pulse. Yet necessary as the Religious Orders are to the fulness of the Church's life, there is an extraordinary silence on the subject in her schools and pulpits, and doubtless many Vocations are lost owing to ignorance of the principles of this Life due to lack of definite teaching. This tiny booklet is an attempt by the method of question and answer, to give in a simple form, so far as space permits, the substance of the teaching of some of the Doctors of the Church on this important subject.

What is the Religious State?

"The Religious State," says St. Thomas Aquinas, "is a school where one learns how to become perfect and applies himself to exercise that conduct to perfection.

What is the perfection to which a Religious is bound to tend?

The perfection of Charity, and close union with GOD.

Why is a person termed a Religious?

Because he is bound by vows to observe the Evangelical Counsels of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience.

Where are these Counsels found?

In St. Matthew's Gospel, Ch: xix, vv. 11, 12, & 21.

What is a vow?

A vow is a promise made to GOD, with knowledge, with deliberation, with liberty, of something good in itself, and better than its opposite.

Are vows peculiar to Religious?

No, we find them also in the Sacraments of Holy Baptism, Matrimony, and Holy Orders.

Why should Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience be aids to perfection?

Because by Poverty a person gives to GOD all his goods and all exterior things; by Chastity he gives to Him his body and his heart with all its affections; and by Obedience he consecrates to Him his soul.

Why does a person enter the Religious State?

In obedience to a Call from GOD. This is termed Religious Vocation.

Is a recognition of a Call from GOD peculiar to Christianity?

No. The Old Testament is full of examples of persons whom GOD called to life-long service.

How does GOD call a person to the Religious Life?

He uses many different methods. Sometimes a person is drawn by a great attraction to the Life. Another may receive the Call through a repulsion.

Sometimes a sermon, a book, or an apparently chance word or meeting, may be the means used. Sometimes, but comparatively rarely, the Call may be distinctly heard. Some have the sense of being set apart, from their earliest years. To others, it is an imperceptible drawing.

How should a person act if he believes himself to be called by GOD?

He should pray earnestly for clear light and guidance, consult an experienced priest, and, if possible, engage in a Retreat.

Is it necessary to obtain the consent of parents before seeking to enter the Religious Life?

Yes, in the case of minors. It is always desirable to try to win such consent, but if the Call is really from GOD, His Will must come first. "He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me."

Does any outside advice relieve a person of the responsibility of obedience to the Call?

No. A great responsibility is incurred by anyone who seeks to hinder, or unnecessarily delay response, but each soul is ultimately responsible to GOD for its own obedience, or disobedience.

Is there not a risk of a person making a mistake in believeing himself to be called to this Life?

The risk of ultimate mistake is very small if the

person is instant in prayer, and whole-heartedly desirous of knowing and doing God's Will. The probationary period in Religious Communities is of considerable length, and Religious Superiors are very careful in providing against the possibility of mistake, since unsuitable subjects would be a serious hindrance to the well being of any Community.

Is unwillingness to inflict pain on others a reason for setting aside the Call?

No. If a person believes in God at all, he must honour His Call at whatever cost to himself or others. He should endeavour by prayer and gentle effort to enable others to realize their share in the sacrifice which God's Call is asking both from him and them.

Does joining a Religious Community involve absolute severance from one's own family?

Not necessarily. Most Communities permit some intercourse with near relations, though naturally such intercourse must be regulated by the Rule.

How does a person obtain admission into a Religious House?

By writing to the Superior for permission to enter. An interview will then probably be arranged, and the Aspirant may be invited for a visit. If everything proves satisfactory, he may then be admitted to the Postulancy or first Probation which is of different duration in different Orders.

If Postulancy is satisfactorily passed, what is the next step?

The Postulant is admitted to the Novitiate. He

is clothed with the Habit of the Order, and enters on his second Probation which lasts usually from two to three years.

What lies at the end of the Novitiate?

If the Novice satisfies the Superior of his fitness for the Religious Life, he is elected for Profession.

What is meant by Profession?

The taking of the threefold Vow. The Religious who has taken his Vows, is a person consecrated for ever to God's Service, who cannot disgrace his high dignity without committing a sacrilege.

What is the difference between Active and Contemplative Orders?

The Active Orders undertake extensive work for the Church. The Contemplatives remain within their enclosure and concentrate mainly on their prayers and worship. The difference is not as great as it seems, since the Active Religious cannot be true to his Vocation, unless his activity is based upon his continual prayer, while the Contemplative must of necessity spend some portion of his time in work. The Religious Life has been compared to a large river, which having diverged into two currents, unites again, emptying itself into the same ocean of Divine Love.

Should a person enter an Active Order chiefly for the sake of the work?

No. The Religious State must always be the holocaust and consecration of man to God, and the work of a Religious must be the fruit of a wholly consecrated life.

Are the Rules of all Religious Orders the same?

No. The rules of the various Religious Orders differ, but the relationship between GOD and the Religious of any Order, as such, is the same.

Upon what lines do the Rules of Religious Orders differ?

The various Religious Rules differ according as they are (*a*) designed to meet no particular need of the Church, but only to live a life of union with GOD, leaving Him to choose their work for them; or, (*b*) designed to live the life of union with GOD, but at the same time to meet some particular need of the Church.

Why does Silence form part of the Rule of all *Religious Orders?*

Because it is the first link in the golden chain of perfection and union with GOD. Silence produces recollection; recollection begets devotion; devotion leads to prayer; prayer effects union with GOD, and Divine Union imparts perfection.

Is it necessary that an Aspirant to the Religious Life should possess private means?

Not in most Communities. The lack of private means ordinarily proves no bar to admission, though where such means exist, they are consecrated, with the person, to the Service of GOD.